

Homily 14th Sunday of the Year 9/7/17

Explanation of the Bishop's new directions for

First Holy Communion, First Confession and Confirmation

'I bless You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever, and revealing them to mere children.'

You'll remember the Bishop's Pastoral Letter from a while ago, about the Sacraments of Initiation – well I thought I'd explain his proposals to you in more detail. He's changing the whole approach to these sacraments. Firstly he's raising the age at which children receive their First Holy Communion and Confession, to Year 4, and lowering the age of Confirmation to Year 6. He feels very strongly that these sacraments shouldn't be too far separated, as Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation are all about initiating children into the Church, and helping them, and their parents to grow in faith. The Bishop also wants them to experience the grace of belonging. He would like every parish to develop a parish based catechises programme for parents and children of sacramental age.

This new approach is a response to the changed circumstances of our present age. When I, and many of you were young these things were generally left to the school, and support from a 'Catholic' home, with varying degrees of practising 'Catholic' parents was taken for granted. Nowadays such things cannot be taken for granted. This new initiative from the Bishop, whereby parents and children prepare together in the parish, is based on programmes from the Church in the USA (I think), and reports so far are very encouraging. The parish will facilitate some two or three sessions per week, led by a Catechist and a helper, and families are able to meet and support each other, and their children, on their journeys of faith. The parents will now have a greater role in teaching the faith to their children. Groups of ten to fifteen families will come together, worksheets are provided, and

discussions on the topics raised will take place between parents, children and catechists – but the new emphasis is strongly on the parents teaching the faith to their children.

Previous experience of this approach – especially from Liverpool, has proved very positive. Whole families become involved in their child's catechises, and there have been reports of non Catholic spouses becoming more involved in the Church, and wanting to understand more about the faith of their children. Some have even gone on to join the Journey in Faith courses run by most Catholic parishes.

In relation to the First Communion Masses, my experience has been that the celebrations have been more fruitful in smaller groups within the Sunday Masses, rather than the one big First Communion Masses we used to have. Perhaps we could look at keeping one of the Masses each weekend, solely for parishioners so that everyone is catered for? I'm thinking particularly of the 11.15 Mass.

However, my main reason for talking to you about these new changes, is so that you are aware of them, and also to ask for your support and prayers in helping make the Bishop's vision a reality – that is for a parish based approach to sacramental formation. Catechists and helpers will be needed to facilitate the programmes, and I will give you more information as the weeks progress. Meanwhile let us offer our prayers for our children, their parents, our school, and all who will contribute to the deepening of faith within our parish.